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EFFORTS TO ELIMINATE SYPHILIS IN THE UNITED STATES BY 2005

Today, it is more feasible than ever to eliminate syphilis in the U.S. If we wait, the opportunity will be lost. In the 20th century, syphilis morbidity in the United States has followed a seven-to-ten year cycle. Levels were low enough in the late 1930s and 1950s that syphilis elimination campaigns were mounted. Although these efforts significantly reduced rates of syphilis, they failed to successfully eliminate the disease.

However, by 1990, the number of cases had declined by 85%, reaching the lowest level ever recorded in the U.S., largely because of effective STD and HIV prevention and control efforts.

As late as the 1940s, syphilis was a disease that affected all socio-demographic groups in the United States. However, in the 1990s syphilis has disproportionately affected a small percentage of the population, often isolated, marginalized groups involved in high-risk activities such as illicit drug use, exchanging sex for money or drugs, and having multiple sex partners. Typically persons affected by syphilis live below the poverty level, and have limited access to health care, lower rates of health insurance, and a number of other non-STD health and social problems. Syphilis disproportionately affects communities of color, particularly African American communities.

Eliminating syphilis is a realistic goal that already has been achieved by other industrialized countries, such as Canada, England, Sweden and Denmark. Several biological characteristics of the disease make elimination feasible: no non-human reservoir, no evidence of antibiotic resistance, and long incubation period, which favors case finding and

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THE GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Anthony A. Williams, Mayor

BLUE-RIBBON CONDOMS: Study Praises Quality of 28 Brands

Condoms are getting better, according to a consumer Reports study of 30 latex models, with all but two proving highly effective in pregnancy and STD transmission. Other key findings:

- Quality has "improved vastly" since 1995, when Consumer Reports found that 7 out of 37 models failed the basic test.
- "Extra strength" condoms fare no better than "regular" or "thin" condoms during tests.
- Despite their bigger price tag, and condoms with spermicide have not "proved to offer more protection than other condoms and could cause health problems for some users."
- Vending machine condoms are every bit as good as store bought ones.
- Several condoms placed in storage following the 1995 tests failed 1999 tests, leading researchers to conclude that condoms' expiration dates should be taken seriously.

Source: Consumer Reports, 6/99 issue.

